

money and awareness. The teens were protesting the closure of a skateboard park.

# SKATEBOARDERS RALLY TO GET A NEW PARK OFF THE GROUND

## Youths draw support, some money for park

BY JIM SCHLOSSER  
Staff Writer

**GREENSBORO** — Take away their skateboards — prohibited downtown — and they still find a way to soar.

As other people ate hot dogs and listened to teen bands during a rally Friday in the plaza between City Hall and the courthouse, a half dozen youngsters climbed to the tops of plaza steps and ledges. They leaped off, swirled and landed on homemade cardboard skateboards with circular protest symbols in the middle. The boys jumped over trash cans and any other object that tempted them.

They landed hurt.

"I just busted my jaw when I hit it against my knee," said a proud Stephen Felde, a Southeast Middle School student, eager to show a scar from a less recent tumble.

A parent standing nearby says injuries are a source of pride to skateboarders.

Everyone felt proud at the end of the two-hour rally to promote the need for a public skateboard park. A red, white and blue donation bucket was flush with greenbacks and a notebook had several pages of people pledging money.

Walker Sanders, president of the Community Foundation of Greensboro stopped by to offer encouragement — and maybe money later.

Sanders said he didn't have time to eat, but presented his business card to 15-year-old Oran Routh, rally leader.

"I'm going to see what can be done," Sanders said. "We're in support of what they're trying to do."



Stephen Felde, 13, uses a cardboard skateboard prop for tricks at the event.

The event was organized by Oran and five teenage friends, who in February founded the Southeast Community Skateboard Park, nicknamed the "Cheese Wagon," in the Forest Oaks community.

The plywood park didn't comply with zoning regulations, but the boys were desperate for a place to skate. They and their boards had been banished from downtown, the UNCG campus and other public places.

They, their friends and others enjoyed about six months of skateboarding before the county forced the park

to close.

The park lacked paved parking, handicapped-accessible bathrooms and other conveniences the county requires.

County officials had ignored the park but had to take action after a resident complained about noise.

At the rally, Oran conducted interviews and spoke from the plaza stage to people sitting on the steps. Youngsters and parents wore T-shirts that said "support the sport of skateboarding."

Teenagers waved cardboard signs that said, "Skateboarding is not a crime" and "Endangered: blue whales, spotted leopard and skateboarders."

Oran said he and his friends want to join with the city or county to build a skateboard park in a public park or elsewhere.

"Anything is better than nothing, wherever it is," he said.

The generations stood united at the rally. Becky and Doug Roberts, who live on West Friendly Avenue, brought their 12-year-old son, Ben, and his friend Harry Brown because the boys lack a decent place to skateboard.

"This is a good civics lesson for them," Becky Roberts said.

Judi and David Hill, longtime downtown residents, came and made a donation.

"We are about the only town this size without a skateboard park," Judi Hill said.

The boys believe Guilford County lacks a skateboard park because no one has pushed for one until now.

See Rally, Page B3

## Rally

Continued from Page B1

"We are the first organized group to come forward and say we need this park," Oran said while parents set up a table offering free hot dogs and soft drinks. Another table was readied for accepting donations.

Pleasant Garden Mayor Ron Surgeon spoke from the stage about how impressed he was Thursday night when the boys made a pitch to county commissioners.

"I take my hat off to you for stepping up to the plate," he said. "I feel your effort will be successful."

He leaped through his billfold to make a donation, then fired a hot dog.

Greensboro Mayor Keith Holliday was invited, but he was busy. He said later he has long noticed great interest in a skateboard park. But he said he believes that because the current push comes from residents outside the city, county commissioners should take the lead.

He also wants to know about liability risks the city would face. He says every time skateboarding has come up in the past, "the attorneys throw up their hands and say you're asking for trouble."

He likes the idea of a public-private park — and even better, a strictly private initiative.

When the rally ended, a dozen boys led by Oran Routh's father, Ryan, walked toward Elm Street holding homemade placards. At First Citizens Bank, at Market and Elm streets, they stopped and peered through windows hoping that Holliday, who works for the bank, was in his office. He wasn't.

The procession disappeared down Elm headed toward Lee Street, where the boys, once free of downtown, intended to climb onto real skateboards and roll to Liberty Road, where parents would take them home.

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